

C Harris, Victor B. (1909-1960), Papers, 1921-1960
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INTRODUCTION

Papers of a St. Louis, Missouri, lawyer active in the St. Louis Civil Liberties Committee, the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Lawyers Guild, Protestants and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State (PAOU), and other organizations relating to the Bill of Rights and civil liberties. Harris specialized in litigation on union issues and free speech during the period of the House Un-American Activities hearings, segregation, and the rights of married women to continue teaching.

DONOR INFORMATION

The Harris Papers were donated to the University of Missouri on 15 April 1961, by his widow Roberta L. Harris (Accession No. 3473).

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Victor B. Harris was born in 1909 in Hutchinson, Kansas. He attended the University of Arkansas, then received his LL.B. from the University of Missouri in Columbia in 1931. Harris was a member of the St. Louis, the Missouri, and the American Bar Associations and the National Lawyers Guild. Immediately after his graduation he began practicing law in St. Louis with Carr & Carr & Graveley (1931-1932), then with Oliver Blackington (1932-1937), and finally with Smith, Harris & Hanke from 1937. The senior partner Luther Ely Smith was an area representative for the American Civil Liberties Union. When Harris joined the firm he assisted with these cases and soon assumed responsibility for several of them.

Harris was an unsuccessful candidate for the Missouri State Senate in 1944 and was defeated in his 1948 bid for the Republican nomination for state senator. Harris served as vice president of the National Lawyers Guild and was active in the St. Louis Civil Liberties Committee for many years. He was the attorney during the original investigation into the 1942 beating death of Edward Melendes, a Mexican citizen held in a St. Louis police cell. Harris was also the attorney during the long appeal process of *Al Friedman v. the International Machinists Union*.

Harris was an organizer of the St. Louis Chapter of Protestants and other Americans United for Separation of Church and State (POAU) in 1952, served as its secretary until his death in 1960, and was on the organization's national advisory council. The POAU was a non-professional organization to which Harris devoted his legal talents and most of his free time. The propaganda of the POAU was primarily anti-Catholic. Harris, who believed that Catholic dogma prohibited the separation of church and state, anticipated undue influence by the Pope and other church officials upon citizens and elected officials. He was the author of several pamphlets on church-state separation. Harris was a member of the official board of St. John's Methodist Church in St. Louis.

Harris' first marriage to Abigail H. Henry ended in divorce around 1953. In 1955 he married Roberta Christy Lucas Sprengnether. Harris died of a heart attack, at his home, on 14 June 1960. He was survived by his wife, her three children, Robert L., Madelon, and Ronald J.

Sprenghether, his mother, Eliza Harris, and a sister, Urano Tumiata.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Harris Papers are divided into three series: **Professional Papers, Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State (POAU)**, and **Personal Papers**. The concentration of the collection is on the professional career of Victor B. Harris, however, his work for the organization Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State is strongly represented.

As an attorney Harris handled civil rights cases for the American Civil Liberties Union and the St. Louis Civil Liberties Committee. Among his cases represented in the **Professional Papers** series were *St. Louis, Missouri v. Pulitzer Publishing Company*; *Willard Williams v. Dr. Ivan W. Steele, Warden*; *Marrian Timmerman v. Sexton, et. al.*; *Al Friedman v. International Association of Machinists, et. al.*; and *Teachers' Federation of St. Louis County v. St. Louis School Board*. These cases covered such issues as segregation, the right to criticize a judge, freedom of the press, the right of married women to teach, the right to attend meetings of the Communist Party, loyalty tests for lawyers, and whether the U.S. Postmaster General had the right to determine what could and could not be sent through the mail. Harris saw many of these cases through the appeals process from state to federal levels. The series includes briefs, correspondence and research notes. It does not deal with his political career or cover all of his cases or business dealings. The Professional series is arranged by the earliest date of association with an organization or case.

The **Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State** series contains Harris' correspondence, articles, and research in behalf of the POAU. A large portion of this series deals with the sale of Mill Creek Valley, a section of St. Louis to St. Louis University, a Roman Catholic institution, by the City Redevelopment Corporation. The series is arranged chronologically.

The **Personal Papers** series includes letters between Harris and his second wife Roberta, and correspondence with educational institutions concerning his step-children. In the 1940s and 1950s Harris made frequent trips to Mexico, maintaining friendships and business associations with residents of Mexico City. Several of the letters are in Spanish. At the end of the collection is a scrapbook volume prepared by Roberta Harris after her husband's death. This series is arranged in chronological order.

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